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Peel Police Services Board  
Address to Knight's Table AGM  
November 22, 2016

## **Empowerment through Community Engagement**

Good evening.

What an absolute honour and pleasure it is to be here this evening with all of you -- the people who make up the Knight's Table.

When I was asked to speak this evening about community engagement, I didn't hesitate to jump at the invitation.

For almost three decades, your organization has been helping and feeding people who are less fortunate and homeless.

And, you do that with a small, efficient staff -- and an army of dedicated volunteers.

So, from the bottom of my heart, it is truly MY pleasure to be able to speak to such a distinguished group of local heroes.

And, that word..."heroes"....is thrown around a lot these days.

But, what does it really mean?

As you know, I am Chair of the Police Services Board for Peel. And, our police service has thousands of heroes....men and women were are proud of.

They risk their lives every day and keep us safe. Indeed, they are heroes.

But, heroes take on many forms -- and that's where you fit in.

I knew about your work...but it wasn't until I really started researching that I found out how amazing the Knight's Table is in our community.

I was floored to learn you serve 74-thousand meals each and every year.

You do this through the generosity of people and companies who dig deep into their pockets and donate money.

But, it takes more than money.

You need volunteers...and you have over 3-thousands of them.

That's an army.

In fact, that's how many police services employees we have....3-thousand....to serve the entire Peel region.

So, I don't want to rush over that number.

3-thousand people who aren't being paid.

3-thousand people who take time away from their own lives and families to help others they don't even know.

3-thousand people who serve and walk with those living in poverty

3-thousand heroes.

You are truly amazing. You are leaders and role models.

Bob Dylan said, "I think of a hero as someone who understands the degree of responsibility that comes with his freedom.

Many of us are very fortunate and will never know hunger or homelessness. We live in a great country. Yet you give your time and energy willingly when no one is asking you to do so.

That is what makes all of you and this community so incredible.

\*\*\*\*\* (Pause and place your hand over your heart) \*\*\*\*\*

THAT is what being a hero is all about. Selflessness.

And, I thank you on behalf of the Peel Police Services Board.

So, tonight, I'm talking about community engagement.

I believe community engagement is how others help you identify challenges and then help you put a plan in place to solve those challenges.

That can be HUNGER.

It can be HOMELESSNESS.

And, it can even be how a POLICE SERVICE DOES – OR DOES NOT - reflect its community.

So, please allow me a few minutes to speak about how your Police Services Board is ramping up its community engagement.

As the Police Services Board, we are community members tasked by the Government of Ontario to oversee the Police Service.

Despite what people may think, we are not employees of the police service. We are not police officers.

We represent YOU -- the community.

And, we are currently increasing the amount of community engagement we are doing for a number of reasons.

We are taking the unprecedented move as a Board of asking the citizens of Peel to tell us how we are doing and how we can do better.

This is YOUR police service -- and we are moving toward greater openness and transparency because it's the right thing to do.

As well, we know our community has changed over the years and as a police service, we have not kept pace with those changes.

We now have a diverse community with a high proportion of visible minorities – more than 60% of our community.

Yet, only 18% of our police service is from minority groups.

Furthermore, only 19% of our officers are women.

That gap is not shrinking -- this is COMPLETELY UNACCEPTABLE.

And it's not like this is a legacy problem. It is a problem today.

We hire about 100 new police officers every year and we are finding we're not getting enough visible minorities and women applying for the new jobs.

So...we reach out and begin an aggressive community engagement process.

It is important to note that -- like hunger -- this is not a Peel-specific issue.

It's a national issue in policing that many communities are struggling with.

So, we have work to do to reflect our community.

And, I can assure you we are well on our way.

The Board has taken steps to move forward as we are determined to have more openness and transparency.

One of the first initiatives was last year's resolution to suspend Street Checks also known as carding.

It was through community engagement that the Board heard how this practice was affecting Black males disproportionately.

The provincial government acted quickly and drafted new legislation to replace street checks.

Peel police was the first in Ontario to start implementing the changes. Again, Peel showed the province and the country how it leads.

Our plan is to continue leading the way in policing.

As you know, the Board has decided to do a comprehensive independent review of recruitment and promotional policies.

We are doing this to understand what the service is doing right and what other steps need to be taken to address this gap.

It is also critical to enhance trust of the community.

We are taking several initiatives to this end.

For the first time ever - the Board's budget meeting in September was held in front of the public.

We are also in the process of opening up a large portion of committee deliberations to the public.

We are encouraging community groups for dialogues with the Board.

Even in such a wonderful and progressive country as Canada we do have a segment of population that does not have a voice.

You are well aware of this segment as you serve it every day. For too long their concerns have not been heard or addressed.

Your Police Board has started conversations with organizations like the United Way to figure out how best to reach this group of our citizens; how our brothers and sisters and children who have been marginalised can be best reached.

We want to assess what concerns them and how the police can work differently to help their unique issues.

Your Board's position is that it is our responsibility to help this vulnerable group's quality of life by providing solutions that work best for them.

Stay tuned as we embark on this important piece of journey.  
That is why I say to you "please don't be shy. We are here to listen."

All of you here this evening, the employees, volunteers and supporters of the Knight's Table ARE the community we serve.

You have a lens on the community that we may not have -- and it's vital that you engage and share those thoughts with us.

I know that all of you appreciate the purpose of giving back.

You don't just talk about it. You lead by example as we see every year.

Together, we have the same goal: to make our communities the best they can be for everyone regardless of race, religion, gender, age or social status.

I am not the first to say this, and certainly won't be the last, but Knight's Table is a jewel in this community.

And, I know you don't do what you do for credit -- but you should all be very proud. I am very proud that we have people like you who give selflessly to make this community better.

Again, thank you very much for inviting me to be here tonight and allowing me the privilege of speaking with you.

In our Canada, in our Peel Every one has a place.  
In our Canada, in our Peel every one has a voice.